The 27 May 1960 coup put an end to the first experience in Turkey of multiparty democracy. It was the first of a series of military interventions which have subsequently marked the political life of the country.\(^1\) In 1950 the first free elections resulted in the victory of the Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti, DP) over the Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), previously the sole party in Turkey. The Democratic Party triumphed at the following elections in 1954, but this also marked the beginning of a more authoritarian mode of government with restrictions on the freedom of the public, the press, and the opposition. Against a backdrop of claims that the 1957 elections had not been free and fair, the opposition between the two main parties in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey became increasingly radicalised, and İsmet İnönü, the leader of the Republican opposition, a former companion of Atatürk and erstwhile President, was physically threatened even. In late April 1960 there were serious clashes between students and the police, and the month of May was marked by a string of protests in Ankara, with cadets from the military school joining in the demonstrations. With the government exerting less and less control over the situation, on 27 May the Army intervened and overthrew the DP government, officially to “prevent a fratricidal struggle.”

In a declaration of 27 May, immediately after taking power, the junta stated:

> Our Armed Forces have taken this initiative for the purpose of extricating the parties from the irreconcilable situation into which they have fallen and for the purpose of having just and free elections, to be held as soon as possible under the supervision and arbitration of an above-party and

impartial administration, and for handing over the administration of whichever party wins the elections.²

This declared intention to hand over power to civilians within a new framework was accompanied by a request to a group of law professors to draw up a new Constitution. In the night of 27 to 28 May, an envoy from the National Unity Committee (Milli Birlik Komitesi, MBK), comprised of the officers involved in the coup, went and fetched from their homes eight professors at the Istanbul University Law Faculty and took them by plane to Ankara.³ That same day it was decided to form a cabinet made up of “technocratic” ministers, in other words issued from the upper echelons of the civil service and without any links to a political party.

The very fact of calling on the civil service and law professors changed the nature of the coup, triggering a constitutional process over which the military progressively lost control. Whereas the Constitution was originally meant to be written within a few months, it in fact took over one year and the number of those involved increased considerably. The process can be roughly divided into three phases: from May to October 1960 the first Committee worked under the supervision of the military. Despite major disagreements between the members of the Committee, it handed in its draft to the MBK on 17 October. Over the course of the month of October there was increasing opposition to the Committee’s draft, and tension built up between the military and the professors. At this stage it also became clear that the draft would not be adopted in its current state and that a Constituent Assembly would be set up. A second brief period ran from late October to January 1961, during which a new Committee was tasked with deciding on what form the Constituent Assembly would take. In January this Assembly was finally elected and it approved the new Constitution on 27 May 1961, exactly one year after the coup. This constitutes the third phase. The Constitution was definitively adopted by referendum on 9 July 1961. This Constitution considerably modified the framework of Turkish politics as it created new institutions more explicitly guaranteeing fundamental liberties (in particular the Constitutional Council), introduced a series of social rights, and promoted economic development under the aegis of the State (by setting up a planning body in particular).

Most studies of 27 May 1960 interpret the coup as an act of revenge by the ‘deep state’ (even if the expression is a recent one) on the Democratic

³ See below table 6.1 for the members of the Committee of law professors.